CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

Interview with CORA MASTERS BARRY
Interviewed by Betty King

Cora Masters Barry was a Professor of Political Science at the University of the District of Columbia in 1978. She worked for and supported Marion Barry in every one of his political campaigns. Mayor Barry appointed her as Chairwoman of the DC Boxing and Wrestling Commission, the first woman to hold such a position in the US. In 1993 she married Marion Barry. She founded the Recreation Wish List in 1994 and in 2001 opened the highly successful Southeast Tennis and Learning Center.

Date: August 13, 2016

BK: When did you come to the District?

CB: I came to the District August 14th, 1970, and the reason I know that exact date, because my daughter turned one year old on August 14th in 1970.

BK: And you came here with your husband and your family?

CB: No, I came as a single parent who just was in graduate school. And I had been in graduate school at Hayward State in California, and I came here to finish up at Howard and I brought my daughter with me.

BK: I met you in 1978, in February of 1978, and I was doing Marion's birthday party out of the campaign headquarters and they said, “Cora will help you.” And I said, “Who’s Cora?” So, by that time, clearly, you were a good friend of Marion Barry’s. When did you meet Marion?

CB: I met Marion formally at WUST, which was an old radio station on Sherman Avenue, and they were having a rally for Walter Fauntroy, who was running for non-voting delegate. It was the first non-voting-delegate election. [Fauntroy won and served for many years.]

BK: Right. That was, what, 1971?

CB: Yeah, it was 1971. And I was standing in the outer lobby. Marion came in. He had on a cowboy hat. He came over. He started talking to me, and they called his name to go up on stage. I had heard about him because he was with SNCC [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee], but I had never really formally met him. I had seen him a couple of times. And then he just said, "Here, hold my hat." So, I took his hat and he went up on stage, and I decided I wanted to leave, so I gave his hat to somebody else and I left. And that was the first time I met him.

BK: Leaving you holding the hat. And so, when you finished at Howard, in what year did you finish at Howard?

CB: Oh, God, that's hard.

BK: That was a graduate degree, was it?

CB: Graduate, my master's degree in public administration. Me and Pauline Snyder [attorney, much later Corporation Counsel in a Barry administration] graduated in the same class, and I don't remember, '72, '73, something like that.

BK: And then what did you do after that?

CB: Well, I worked with Dr. [Dorothy] Height at the National Council of Negro Women. I taught, and then I got a professorship at UDC [University of the District of Columbia]. And I did a lot of volunteering and other stuff in between, but those were my jobs.

BK: Now, when I met you in '78, you were teaching at UDC.

CB: I was teaching at UDC then.

BK: Did you support Marion when he ran for the school board?

CB: Absolutely. When he started talking about going to the school board, I was on his first campaign, was me, a woman named Lucia, who is now in Florida, Anita Bonds [deputy campaign manager for Barry in 1978] –

BK: Thornell Page? [Director of Extension Services at UDC and Democratic activist]

CB: Thornell Page, Ivanhoe [Donaldson, Barry's campaign manager in 1978], all of us, yeah.

BK: Was Ivanhoe involved in the school board campaign?

CB: Yeah, yeah, he was there. I'm trying to think of who was Marion's campaign manager. I can't remember. But, yeah, I was in the school board race. And it was funny, because Marion, still fresh from the South, couldn't talk. And it was always, he would say, "Save the chirin." And we would say, "No." The theme of his campaign was "Save the Children." And he would say, "Save the chirin." We said, "No, you have to say 'save the chil-dren.'" And it was quiet an ingenious campaign, because Anita Allen was the chair of the School Board] and if you turned on television, and the news would show it, she would have her enemies on her left side and her friends on the right side. It was so divisive that it was just crazy. So, Marion ran and won.

BK: And then, of course, he went on a few years later to run at large for the DC City Council.

CB: Well, yes and no.

BK: Explain that.

CB: I don't know how much of this I should share with you, because this is going to be in my book. But I will say that originally he did not want to run at large. He wanted to run for the chairmanship. So, they created a committee to draft Marion Barry for chairman of the city council. The chairman of that committee was [Reverend] David Eaton of All Souls [Unitarian Church], and I was the coordinator, which meant David did nothing and

I did all of the work. And Ivanhoe was involved in that. Reginald Robinson was involved in that. And that was my first real campaign lesson from Marion Barry.

BK: Who was Reginald Robinson?

CB: He was from SNCC. He's around. See, he, John Wilson [later a City Council member and ultimately Council chairman], Ivanhoe, all of those people came out of the movement. So, they were having a rally at that hotel that's in – I don't know what it is now. You know on 14th Street, in that circle there?

BK: Yeah.

CB: That hotel, I think it was – it had so many names. They were having a rally there. Because on May 7, which is my birthday, by the way, is why I remember that, was going to be our first – we were going to get the charter to have elected officials. And I had a petition for people to sign to draft Marion for chairman of city council. And you know how those draft committees are. They always are created by the candidate. So, I went up to – union guy. I was just talking to him. .

BK: Josh Williams?

CB: No, no, no.

BK: Bill Lucy? [International Secretary-Treasurer of the Association of State, County and Municipal Employees]

CB: Yeah, Bill Lucy. And I asked him would he sign it. And he said, "Not only am I not going to sign it, he's not going to be chairman, and nobody is going to sign this mess, and you need to get out of people's face." And so, I left and went around the corner, in the building, and Marion was looking for me. Finally, he found me, and I was over there and he saw I was crying. He said, "What are you crying about?" I said, "Well, that man over

there said," and he said, "Oh, you go over here and you ask everybody." So, I got my first political lesson from him. "You ask everyone so they can never say they wasn't asked. Forget him, and just go out and get your signatures." So, what happened after that was the powers to be – remember Carroll Harvey?

BK: Sure.

CB: He lived in Southwest at Carroll's Mill Square. It was a meeting down there with Marion, myself, Carroll Harvey [a deputy mayor in the first Barry administration]. I don't know if John Hechinger [prominent businessman and Democratic party leader] was down there or not. Walter Fauntroy was down there. And I can't think of everybody. I have to go back and look. And it was a discussion about why Marion should not run for chairman, but he should concede and let Sterling [Tucker of the Urban League run, and he should run at large. And that was the general consensus.

BK: "It's not your turn yet?"

CB: That's really a smoke-filled room. I mean literally, really, because everybody was smoking then. So, I was just there as an operative, little person who helped petition. So maybe a few days later Marion called me. And I always tell this story, because it's amazing. He called me, and he said, "I need to talk to you. I need you to meet me on the corner of 12th and Pennsylvania Avenue," which was where the school board was. So, I went there. Because I worked very, very hard for this draft committee. I mean, Ivanhoe would come in and get my papers. He said, "I wish I had – if I had ten of you." I worked very hard. And so, I had my heart and soul in it.

So, Marion called me and told me where to meet him on the corner. He said, "Don't come upstairs. Just meet me on the corner," and he was chairman of the school board.

He come down and he met. And he said, "I'm telling you now. I'm not going to run as chairman. I'm going to run as at large. And I think you ought to know." And I started crying. He said, "Well, don't cry," he said, "because within a year or two" – and he did just like this. Every time I go past that corner I think about it. He said, "A year or two, everybody in this city is going to think they know me personally." And I said, "Okay." So, he ran and he won. And I think the rest of the story is he ran and he won, and then two years later he ran for mayor.

BK: Well, of course, two years later, when the first Home Rule Council met, they drew straws, and Marion got, instead of a four-year straw, a two-year straw. So, in '76, he ran again for reelection as an at-large member of the city council, although whisper, whisper, whisper, he was really preparing to run for mayor.

CB: Mayor, right.

BK: You were involved in that, too.

CB: Yeah, I was involved in all his elections. And when he was running [in 1978], it was [Incumbent City Council chairman] Sterling Tucker, [attorney] John Ray, and I don't remember who else, but those were the three ones I remember because –

BK: No, [incumbent DC Mayor] Walter Washington, Sterling Tucker.

CB: Sterling Tucker.

BK: Marion, John Ray.

CB: And John Ray.

BK: And Dorothy Maltsby.

CB: Yeah, see, I would never remember that.

BK: She dropped out and endorsed Walter Washington. And John Ray was induced to drop out and endorse Marion.

CB: Yeah, but I'm going to tell you about that. I didn't even think about Walter Washington. He was the incumbent. He was so insignificant in my world. But, yeah, I was thinking about the other people who were running against him. And I was dating John Ray at that time.

BK: You were dating John Ray?

CB: Uh-huh. I mean it wasn't like every day, but, yeah, dating him, yeah, going out.

BK: That's a little-known part of history that I hadn't heard about.

CB: Right. Well, it's not anything that I want to go around telling people about. So, Marion cut a deal with John, "If you drop out and give me your little four votes, I'll make sure that you take my place on the city council." So, make a long story short, we went into the campaign. So, what do you want to talk about on that before we talk about what a snake John Ray was?

BK: We got him elected, though.

CB: But Marion asked me – and I remember Bitsy Folger [socialite and member of Barry's 1978 finance committee] – he had John Hechinger, Bitsy Folger, and all those are supportive of John Ray. I was supporting – by that time I had stopped dating him.

BK: No. No. Bitsy was with Marion from the beginning as mayor.

CB: No. No, for city council. For city council, listen.

BK: John Ray ran for the city council in '76?

CB: Yeah. So, Bitsy Folger, because I went to her house up here, and they had a campaign headquarters. I forgot exactly the street, but I remember Ted Gay [frame shop owner and

political strategist] was his campaign manager, and Virginia – black woman who had the white hair.

BK: Lived in Trinidad.

CB: That's right.

BK: Moy. Virginia Moy.

CB: Yes. Marion said, "I need you to help John." And I said, "Okay."

BK: No. I'm sorry. This is after Marion was elected mayor.

CB: Well, he was put in there, but then he had to come back and run for the position.

BK: Right. Exactly. The Democratic State Committee appointed him.

CB: Right.

BK: And then he had to run in the special election.

CB: Yeah. And Sharon [Pratt Dixon, member DC Democratic State Committee] was a part of that at that time. I think she was a chair. If not, she was the treasurer of the Democratic State Committee, because she resisted it.

BK: No, Bob Washington was the chair.

CB: Well, then she was the treasurer, and she resisted it. I remember…

BK: Who was this?

CB: Sharon Pratt. I remember it just like yesterday, because she didn't want it.

BK: She was supporting – I can't remember who she was supporting, but I know she was so upset [during the meeting when the State Committee appointed John Ray to Marion's Council seat] she went into the ladies' room and threw up.

CB: She did not want John Ray. But when it was time for him to run, Marion asked me to help him.

BK: Oh, so Bitsy and John Hechinger and so forth, they would've all –

CB: They were all behind him. It's important that you remember that, because at that time I had stopped dating John. We didn't date long, because he couldn't talk. He had bad grammar, and he was a mean man. So, we didn't hang in there that long. He wasn't married then or anywhere near it, and neither was I. I was in between husbands, I think, or maybe I hadn't started getting married yet. I don't remember. Yeah, I was Masters. I wasn't Wilds yet. So, I would go to the campaign headquarters. And Lorraine Whitlock [Ward 7 coordinator for Barry in 1978] loved him. She was a big supporter of his.

BK: From Ward 7, yes.

CB: Ward 7. I lived in Ward 7. That's an important point. And she used to try to control me, so that never worked out. That's why Marion was such a great politician. He knew how to handle people. She said, "I wouldn't go get signatures." She said she's not a signature-getting person. Find something else for her to do. You're not going to make her do what you want her to do. We didn't get along at all, not at all. I thought she was a horrible, mean person.

BK: You were both too dynamic.

CB: Yeah. Yeah. Strong-willed, whatever. But I would go to the campaign, where I worked very hard, and then one day I was in a meeting with John Hechinger, John Ray, Ted Gay, and I don't remember who else was in that meeting. It wasn't a big meeting. It was just about five or six people there. And they, especially John Hechinger, talked about him, talked to him so badly. Now, remember, I'm a Marion Barryite. Marion would literally fight people, so I wasn't used to this. So, when John Hechinger finished, I kind of sat up

and waited for John to say something like, "Well, you can't talk to me like that" or whatever.

BK: What was he giving him hell about?

CB: I don't remember the topic. I just remember the tone. And I'm sitting there thinking, "What the hell? How is he going to talk to him like that?" But when he did finish, John said, and I quote, "Well, yeah, you're right, John." I left there. I never went back. Marion called me and said, "They said you're missing." I said, "I'm not going to support him." I said, "I'm not going to vote for him. I'm not going to work for him. And he is a snake. And they are baking a cake for you." Because I remember some things that Bitsy Folger said when I was there. They all had plans.

I said, "You watch what I tell you." He says, "Well, what you going to do?" I said, "I'm not going to do anything. I'm not going to work against him, but I'm not going to work for him." Well, we know how that all turned out. And I had a good time telling Marion, "I told you so." But I picked it up when I was at Bitsy Folger's house. They had a cake they were baking for Marion. They really did not want him to be mayor.

BK: Really?

CB: Uh-uh. After that first election, Bitsy never was on Marion's side. Lorraine [Whitlock] was.

BK: Oh, Lorraine was.

CB: Yeah.

BK: And John Hechinger was as well.

CB: Yeah. That's what I remember.

BK: So aside from that birthday party that you and I gave for Marion in March of 1978, what else did you do during that ’78 campaign?

CB: Oh, my God.

BK: I know, everything, but can you just – I mean do you have some anecdotes?

CB: Well, I’ll tell you what I take credit for. One of the first things I did, there was a woman who worked with me, white woman, who lived up here in Ward 3. Her name was Betty Randall. I was in social sciences. I was in political sciences. She was head of the department, and she was an anthropologist, and so she had really racial sensitivity. She would never go to the Bahamas with her husband because she thought it was insensitive. She was that kind. I loved Betty. And she took to me. And Marion had yet to break in up here. His first meet-and-greet was at Betty Randall’s house. And I set that up with him. And, of course, Betty has gone on to the ancestors. But that was one thing I did. I did a lot of that. I got Marion into – at that time, Marion would go and do a lot of meet-and-greets. It would be ten, maybe fifteen people at the most in a place. He’d go in people’s basements and their backyard. And I kept those things going, and that’s how he connected with people.

BK: Oh, yeah. He was out every night at several different places.

CB: Right. Yes. And so, I did a lot of that. I did everything. I mean I worked. I have never since then, not even on the comeback have I worked this hard as I worked on that campaign, because I really, really believed in him. And when the *[Washington] Post* endorsed him, it was a fabulous endorsement. And I remember getting up that morning, mopping the kitchen floor, talking to God, saying, “This is the man. You got to make him.” And I went all over. They tried to pigeonhole me again, in terms of a poll. I went

to all the different polls. And I would meet the old people. I did my own stuff. Marion knew what I was doing. I would meet them and walk with them and say, "You got to give this young man a chance. Walter Washington, he's had his day." And they'd say, "You think so, baby?" I did that.

I mean until those polls closed – my whole world changed the moment they closed the polls. I'll never forget that. And I then finally went and picked up my cleaning, and I did a few other errands. Up until that point, when I saw people, they were not people. They were potential voters. So, if I was in the dentist's office, I'd talk people into – I would call Marion, say, "Look, I just met this person in the dentist's office. Here's his address. Here's his phone number. Call him." And Marion would call him. That was the kind of campaigner he was. I mean I would just pick people off the street. "What's your number? Would you like to speak to Marion Barry?" And I'd say, "I just met this person at the bus stop. I want you to call them." Some people don't understand. That's worth ten, fifteen, twenty votes. Because that one person would just be worth going to their house.

BK: We won by less than 1,500 votes.

CB: Right. Right. And it might have been them people I had in them basements. So, I did that. I did a lot – helped him with his fundraising, but I was mostly – what do you call getting people to vote for him, get him in the community".

BK: Get out the vote, GOTV.

CB: Yeah. And making him connect – opening doors for him to connect with, and he was a joy. And I've never worked with anybody since then, except maybe my brother, who was as much a joy as him. Because whatever he needed to do, he did it.

BK: Absolutely. Absolutely. And he understood perfectly that people vote for people who ask them to do it.

CB: Ask them to do it.

BK: John Ray was never – he was very bad with that.

CB: Yeah, he was horrible. I remember when I pulled up in front of my house on Lyle Place – and my husband supported Sterling Tucker, which was never going to make any difference anyway, because my husband wasn't a – I was married then, yeah. My husband wasn't a – what you call it?

BK: Who were you married to then?

CB: My husband, Moses Wilds. I was Cora Masters Wilds, remember? He wasn't a go-getter. So, he would go and maybe answer a few phones. He said, "We can cover the bases." I said, "You're not going to matter. If he does win, they'll never remember you because you're not working. So, you can go there and pass out literature if you want to, but you will not be on the list." And he never liked Marion. And I never will forget, when I went in, had my clothes in my hand from the cleaners, I looked to the left. He was looking – he was at the TV at the den. He looked at me, and I looked at him, and I knew Marion had won. And I just threw up my clothes and screamed and yelled and went upstairs, got in the tub, took a bath. He said, "I'll take care of the kids." I said, "Of course you will." And I left and went to the –

BK: Harambee House Hotel.

CB: Yeah. Yeah.

BK: And tell about that. What was it like at the Harambee House?

CB: I mean it was just magic. I remember it just like yesterday. Also, during the campaign, I got to know Effi [Cowell] very well. And there was a lot of controversy about Effi. Marion had married Effi [in 1978] right before or during the time he was running.

BK: Yeah, June or July they got married.

CB: Right. Yeah. And people were saying, this is a true story, too, that he had married a white woman. So, me, Effi, four or five of my other friends, we all went down – remember this organization, we called it Network Plus, remember, we had those fundraisers. We went down to Hilton Head so she could get a tan. I swear to God. And she would say, "Well, you have to come with me." And I'd go out, and I'd say, "Effi, are you tan yet?" I didn't need to be out there. I'll never forget it. I'd say, "Effi, are you tan yet?" I said, "You got to get some color on you, but I'm getting too black." So, we stayed there for a week.

BK: Now, there was a group of you who ran together. Madeline Petty was one.

CB: It was Madeline Petty, Marlene Johnson, Thornell Page['s wife] Essie Page, Diane Moore, Doris Browne, all of us.

BK: You were a group of Effi supporters and friends.

CB: Right. Right. And Norma Stewart, yeah.

BK: So, we win, and it's transition time. Did you work on the transition?

CB: No, I did not work on the transition.

BK: On the inaugural?

CB: I worked on the inaugural, yeah.

BK: Putting together the parties and programs and so forth?

CB: Parties and programs and having some creativity, yeah. And I was, at that time, dating a guy I met in – my husband and I broke up right after Marion won and – this guy named Solomon – boxing, that's how I got interested in boxing.

BK: Oh, into boxing. Okay. Now talk about that.

CB: Well, Marion won. And to the victor goes the spoils. I had a few options that he offered me – none that he offered me that I wanted.

BK: You had no interest in coming in? You were going to stay (inaudible 23:55).

CB: I only wanted to do one thing, and that was to be a lobbyist, based on what I knew I could do. But he sent me down there to interview with the woman who's a judge now.

BK: Judith Rogers.

CB: Yeah, she was head of Intergovernmental Relations. And after I interviewed with her, I knew that wasn't going to work. So, I came back and said, "No, never mind. I'm just going to stay over here." And the main reason I decided to stay over there, because at that point I was a single mother. And working, as you know, for the government, especially for Marion, there's no hours. And I wanted control over being with my kids. And I didn't want to be out all night and day. So, he kept saying, "Why don't you get on this commission?" "I don't like that. That's boring." "Why don't you get on this commission?" "I don't like that. That's boring."

So, he said, "What do you want?" So, one day I called him, and I said, "You asked me what I want." And he said, "Yes, I did." And he asked me what I wanted. "I want to be on the Boxing Commission." Because we had had a fundraiser, and they were incompetent, they were sexist, they were ignorant, and they were horrible.

BK: You had a fundraiser, what, at a boxing –

CB: We decided we wanted to do a fundraiser to raise funds for the athletic program of the city, because it was cutting back. And we decided to do boxing because I was connected with this guy. And we did it at the armory. It was a great event, and we made money, I think about $12,000. It was a lot of money back then. And in doing that, we had to deal with the regulations. And that's when I found out how horrible they were. They were sexist. They were incompetent. They were horrible. They were big, fat men, with big, fat stomachs, and they would sit around and smoke cigars. And like even the night of our event, the event started at seven. At 6:30, the ring wasn't up. So, I called Marion then and said, "I want to be on the Boxing Commission." And he said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, I can handle it if you can." I said, "Okay." So, I went on about my business. I almost forgot about it. And I was working for Jimmy Carter['s presidential campaign].

BK: That would be 1976.

CB: I was working for Jimmy Carter when he was about to lose.

BK: No, it would've been 1980.

CB: Was his second term, yeah.

BK: Yeah, 1980, yeah.

CB: When Reagan won. But I was in Virginia. They had fired the guy who was the coordinator for Northern Virginia, minority coordinator, and they put me in. And I took a leave of absence from UDC, and I was working right there on the main street in a little walk-up. I did a great job. I got Jesse Jackson. It was a great event. I mean a great experience, even though I didn't know that I was on a losing campaign. But I worked my heart out. And I got a call from Betty King, and she said, "You have to bring your

resume. The mayor has nominated you for the Boxing Commission." I said, "The what?" Because I had forgotten it. You remember that?

BK: I do. I do.

CB: And I said, "The what?" She said, "The Boxing Commission." I said, "I had forgotten all about it," but he obviously did not. So, I got my resume, and I brought it over to Betty King, and then all hell broke loose. That's why I keep telling everybody, "It's not my first time at the rodeo." Because when they found out I was nominated for the Boxing Commission, Betty King called me and said, "I think you need to come up to my office." And I came up to her office, and she showed me a letter that they had circulated. They accused me of everything from prostitution to drug dealing. It was a horrible letter. It was a letter that wasn't signed, though. It was anonymous.

So, I was very upset about it. So, I started calling Marion, started calling Marion, started calling Marion, and he was busy. So finally, I called Pat [Seldon, his executive assistant]. I said, "I don't care what he's doing. I have to talk to him." So, she said, "Okay. I'll have him call you." He called me. "What? What's up?" I said, "Marion, have you seen this letter?" "Yep." I said, "What?" He said, "I told you I could handle it if you could." Bang. That's all he had to say about it. It was up to me to deal with it.

And that was when I think [City Council member and chair of Committee on Consumer Affairs] Nadine Winters was over that committee, and she was going to read that letter into the record. And I called my ex-husband, or my estranged husband, and asked him would he bring the kids and come to my hearing. And he said, "I will, if you promise to give me some free tickets to the boxing thing." And I said, "I promise." And so, he

came with my two kids, and they sat there. And she kept looking over there. And Madeline [Petty] was sitting next to me, kicking me because I was always very just –

BK: Out there.

CB: Yeah.

BK: Out there.

CB: And they would say things, "Have you ever played a sport?" I said, "What, like football?" She'd kick me. I said, "Well, no." I was trying to – and then she said, "Well, we have a letter." She looked over there. She said, "Is that your family?" I said, "Yes." And she said, "Well, I thought you all were separated." I said, "We have a modern family." So, she looked, she said, "Well, it's not signed, so I'm not going to read it into the record." That's how I got that not to be read.

BK: That was very clever of you, Cora.

CB: Yep.

BK: And I'm ashamed of Nadine to have thought that she might even read it.

CB: She was going to read it. She was going to read it. And I called Madeline. I said, "I figured out what I'm going to do. I'm going to do like the Kennedys. I'm going to come up with something." So, that was my nomination to the Boxing Commission, and that's a whole journey.

BK: Yeah. And you served in that for years, didn't you?

CB: Yeah, and I was chairman of it. Marion made me chairman of it. I was on national boards and international boards. I brought a lot of credibility. You know that tape you saw, the one with Muhammad Ali where I brought all the champs to Washington, DC? I did a great job.

BK: You did a fabulous job.

CB: Even though I did run Bobby Abbo's ass out of there.

BK: I forgot.

CB: How could you forget that?

BK: I don't know.

CB: See, that's when I got mad at her. Bobby Abbo was a guy who owned some restaurants up on –

BK: The Roma, on Connecticut Avenue.

CB: Connecticut Avenue.

BK: Or Wisconsin.

CB: What street is UDC on, Connecticut? It's on Connecticut.

BK: I think it was on Connecticut. You're right, Connecticut.

CB: And he was a sexist. What I called him, I said he was a sexist, he was an elitist, and he was a racist. And he was so hard to deal with. And I would call Marion and tell him, "I don't know how much more I can take of this guy. He looks down at the staff, and he talks to me any kind of way." I said, "I don't know how much more of him I can take." Marion said, "Oh, you can handle it." Marion just would not hear me. I remember one morning I called his house I was crying. I said, "Effi, let me talk to Marion." I said, "Marion, I cannot take this guy. This guy – you not hearing me." So, he said, "I'll have somebody talk to him." I said, "Please."

So, I went to the Philippines. This is one of my stories I never forget. I went to the Philippines and Thailand with the executive committee of the WBC, World Boxing Council. I was on the national board, and that's when I met, what's-his-name that got

deposed, Marcos, and his wife. That's a whole other story. I got home, and at that time you had answering machines, you didn't have cell phones and stuff, and there had to be about twenty messages on my answering machine from Rock Newman [a boxing promoter]. "You got to call me. You got to call me. You got to call me. You got to call me." So, I called him. He said, "Where you been?" I said, "I've been out the country. What's going on?" He said, "I went up to the Boxing Commission to get some permits signed, and Bobby Abbo was sitting there with his feet up on your desk."

And, see, Rock Newman looks like he's white. So, he thought he was white. And he said, "He talked about you and the mayor." He kept saying, "He don't mean you no good. He don't mean Marion no good." He couldn't even talk, he was so upset. So, I said, "Tell me what he said." So, it was all this racist stuff and just horrible stuff. Okay. Now, at that time I did not realize it until later, I was PMS-ing, and jet lag, just getting off a plane. I went to the office, and my secretary was sitting at the door. I said, "Go get lunch." So, I said, "Go get lunch." I said, "Is he in there?" She said, "Yeah." So, I went in there, and I cussed his ass out. I blocked the door. He couldn't get out. I don't even remember what I said. I was so angry. But it was all of that had – but it had been documented. Now, it had been documented. So, finally he got past me and ran down the hall and I yelled, "Who you going to tell, motherfucker, who you going to tell?" So, I sat there –

BK: In your usual genteel way.

CB: Yeah. I just sat there waiting for – I was waiting for the sky to fall. So, I got a call. First, I got a call from Carol Thompson Cole, who was over at DCRA [Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs as Director], asking me to come upstairs. I went

upstairs. And she said, "Did you cuss out Bobby Abbo?" I said, "Yes, I did." And she said, "Why?" And I told her. And I said, "Plus, I just found out I started my period." She said, "Well, let me tell you what. Go home and get some rest, and next time you're PMS-ing, don't leave the house. And I'm going to have to talk to the mayor about that." I said, "Okay."

So, I went on home. You called me. "Bobby Abbo says you did blah, blah, blah." I said, "I did." Well, you started telling me something about his mother. I said, "Fuck his mother." I said, "You didn't talk about York Van Nixon's goddamned mother. Don't talk to me about Bobby Abbo's goddamned mother." "Well, he said he was going to tell the mayor. He's giving the mayor an ultimatum. It's him or you." I said, "Okay." So, he left. The mayor never said a word to me about it. And then maybe about a month or so later, just out in some kind of off-the-cuff way, we were all somewhere, and he said, "Yeah, you running around calling people motherfuckers." That's all he ever said about it.

BK: And so, did Bobby resign or did he –

CB: Yeah, he resigned, right away. Because Marion wasn't going to choose him over me. And I said to you, I said, "That's another (inaudible 34:25)." I said, "You see how arrogant that motherfucker is?" Why would he think the mayor would take him over me? Why would he think that? But I kept saying, "He doesn't mean the mayor any good." And I did tell Marion, "You didn't lose anything. Because what he really thought about you, he had already told Rock Newman." So, that was my worst moment.

BK: So, at that time Rock was promoting fights.

CB: Yeah, he was promoting fights. And he was going to get permits for (inaudible 34:53) to do a fight in the District of Columbia. And so, he went in there, and Bobby had his feet up on my desk and he said, "I don't know where the hell she is." He talked about me so bad. You forgot that?

BK: I did. I did forget that.

CB: I never forgot it, because that was horrible. That was terrible. I mean I could've handled it differently, but I never regretted it.

BK: Now, are there any other anecdotes?

CB: Well, I mean don't put that in there, all that. I mean you're going to –

BK: All of that, everything that we have said is on the record.

CB: Oh, shit. You're not going to edit anything?

BK: No editing, no.

CB: Oh, God.

BK: Listen, at least 50 percent of us have used equally bad language in stories that we've told, so don't you worry about a thing.

CB: Well, anyway, I don't really care. There were just great things that happened in that first administration. And what really struck me about that first administration were that Marion had women in amazing positions. Madeline [Petty] was the head of Housing and Community Development, the only woman in the whole country that headed up Housing and Community Development.

BK: Yeah, Madeline Petty.

CB: Yeah. We had Carol Thompson over at DCRA. We had Alexis [Robeson]. I think Alexis was over DPR, Department of Parks and Rec[reation]. He had a lot of women in

nontraditional positions. And we were kind of like a little – and I was heading up – actually, I was the first woman to be appointed to the Boxing Commission. To use my good friend, Hillary Clinton's words, I short-circuited the story. But the journey to be nominated and confirmed really came down to the kind of support that I ultimately ended up getting from Marion. Because it was a lot of resistance. When you come home, when you go to the house, you go downstairs, you're going to see a big article, and it's going to say, "Cora Masters Wilds, no lightweight." Yeah. And that was from Matt. It created a lot of things. I could never have done it. So, he was really far thinking when it came to that kind of thing.

BK: Tell me, as briefly as you can – we could all write a 700-page book about the impact that Marion made, the positive impact that Marion made on the District of Columbia during his times as mayor.

CB: Well, first of all, the reason that *The Washington Post* endorsed Marion the first time is because he was bold. He had vision. He was someone who they felt broke through the sort of handkerchief head – they didn't use that term – of Sterling Tucker. That he would bring the city forth, and he did. And one of the first things he did was he – that was the last time they ever endorsed him, by the way. And the reason that was the last time they ever endorsed him because he leveled the playing field. He looked at the fire department and saw that there was discrimination in how they hired the fire people. He threw out the tests. He looked at the police department. And so, that changed, because he used to – when he was a radical – well, he died a radical.

But when he was with SNCC and when he was with Pride [a youth training and employment program Barry founded], he used to call the police department an occupied

army. So, he changed that in terms of encouraging more people of color to be a part of the fire department. He put in the 33 percent top participation in contracts. I mean he went straight to the economics of it, which I really love that. Because a lot of black people weren't getting any contracts. They weren't a part of what was going on. So, he got through the council, the minority participation. They called it – they have a lot of names for it now, but at that time it was directly related to black people being able to be able to compete, and make the people who were dominating, like –

BK: People of color in general, black, brown, also women.

CB: Right. And what's his name, the parking-lot guy?

BK: Doggett.

CB: Doggett and all of those guys. I mean he was amazing how he – they really respected him. And he could get them in a room and say, "Now y'all got to give up some of this to some of the other – you making all the money. You got to open it up to other people." So, I think he had a great impact in terms of leveling the playing field, empowering women. What's his name that spoke at his funeral who did Georgetown, who developed Georgetown? Anyway, he developed DC and in a way, that as everybody used to say, it used to be a little sleepy southern town, but he had a lot of buildings, a lot of construction. He just took the city to a whole different level. But in doing that, he alienated, or they felt that, the white community and *The Washington Post* felt – they didn't take well to the contracting and the police department and the fire department. I think Marion lost a lot of the white residents when he did what he did with the fire. I think that was the pivotal point.

BK: Really?

CB: Yeah. When he got rid of the chief and made them throw out a lot of those tests that were biased and made them start from scratch, that, I think, is when he really – I know it's when he lost *The Washington Post*, when he did all of that. I mean they never endorsed him again. That was the only time they endorsed him.

BK: They not only endorsed him, they wrote two follow-up editorials.

CB: They did not endorse him. They endorsed him in the campaign form. Because even Sterling Tucker wrote an opposition article, and they wrote an article against his opposition article. I was like, "Damn." No, I have all of that. I have all of that. But he still had patches of people all over the city that loved him, but in general they saw him as a person who was somewhat of a threat to the status quo. He shook up the status quo. But the business community was always behind him, always behind him. When he died, and I'll never forget this, they were doing on-the-street interviews and they asked this white guy, who couldn't have been more than forty – they were talking about, "What should we name after Marion Barry?" It was on K Street. He said, "They should name all of this after him, because it's because of him this is what this is." That's forty years old. So, that means that that legacy has been transferred and developed and carried on. I said, "What does this guy know about Marion Barry?" But he knew about what he had done downtown.

He was so visionary. He was so visionary. And, of course, he had the summer jobs program, which, ad nauseam, people are talking about to this day all over the world. And it was the model for the country. And I never leave my house, within five miles of my house somebody is going to tell me that they got their first job. That that job led to others jobs, and they're living well and doing well.

That jobs program – we were in Philadelphia, at the [2016] Democratic Convention, and some lady from – you weren't even with me that time. She was from Philadelphia. And she was talking about, "And Marion Barry did this. And I told them, 'If Marion Barry could do that, how come we can't do it here?'" I mean I just have to look at people, because they have to have this conversation with me. But that jobs program was amazing.

BK: Amazing, and it saved hundreds of lives.

CB: It saved them and empowered them and got them on their way.

BK: Absolutely, and we've got some of those people on tape. Norm Nixon who worked –

CB: Norm, right.

BK: Who worked on the campaign when he was a senior at Gonzaga. I'm going to record Jamie Raskin, who's about to be elected to Congress. He was one of the – we called them the Baby Brigade. They were teens and preteens who were there at the campaign office every day during this.

CB: Speaking about the Baby Brigade, I'm going to digress. When Marion won the primary – see, everybody always says this but nobody can do it. Nobody has the heart or the soul or the spirit. Marion never punished his enemies. He co-opted them. So, that first year after he won the primary, he enlarged that tent to the extent that people like myself and Betty and all of them was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. We look like chopped liver? We were there with you." You were the one who came up with that button, "With Barry before Primary." Do you remember that?

BK: WBBTP.

CB: Yeah. And we started wearing those things, because we wanted to identify ourselves as the people –

BK: Marion made us give them all back.

CB: I kept mine.

BK: Oh, I did, too. In fact, some supporter of Marion had them printed. It was a black background and then white, it said, "WBBTP": With Barry before the Primary." And I started handing them out in the office.

CB: Yeah, I got it from you.

BK: And Marion saw me, he said, "What does that mean?" And he said, "I want you to get them all back." He said, "We're running" – this was going up to the general election – "we're running to be mayor of everybody." But I kept them, and we used them in subsequent campaigns.

CB: Yeah, we did. And not only that, but you see, that was a model. People talk about it, but they can't do it. I mean, a friend of mine in Ward 8, I won't call his name, went against Marion for something. Right after the election, Marion said, "Come on." And he told everybody, "This is my friend." He talked about that. But then he lost in the election, or lost not an election but supported somebody, and he hates the people. I said, "See." I said, "You talk about how great that was. All you have to do is just be that way." I said, "It really works." It really does. And that's why Marion never lost an election, because Marion thought that he could get anybody to like him. It was always the most amazing thing.

BK: Nine times out of ten, he was right.

CB: He was right. He was so charming and just so down-to-earth that people just took to him. He could defame some of his worst critics. Yeah. So, his first term was the empowerment of women, the schools, the jobs things, obviously the seniors. Because I used to say then, "If I, when I grow old" – which I thought I never was. Okay. Well, now here I am – "I want to grow old in Washington, DC," because he empowered and took care of the seniors. It got to a point where I was wondering, "Are they paying for anything?" Remember, he had that golden card, and with that golden card they didn't have to pay but a minor, if anything, to get on the bus. I mean it was just amazing. He was brilliant, he was compassionate, but he was politically way ahead of his time. So, to this day, it's unfair. None of the seniors like anybody but Marion. I said, "Why aren't they all dead by now?"

BK: There are a great many people in this town when you say "the mayor," that's only one person.

CB: That's only one person.

BK: Everybody else has to have a last name. Mayor Bowser, Mayor – you know.

CB: And we had a big discussion, me and her, because I came to her house and she talked to me. And I'm not going to get into all the details, but Mayor Gray was running for Ward 7, and they're not good friends. So obviously, they heard that I was appointing him. And that came up, and we had a good conversation. I said, "I'm going to just say this to you." I said, "You can take it, take my advice or not." I said, "You can't be the person that your enemy is my enemy." I said, "It doesn't work like that." I said, "My politics started way before you were probably born." I said, "I don't like what's-her-name, and I love what's-his-name, and it has nothing to do with you."

I said, "Now, I'm going to give you a story. Marion Barry, I was a political supporter of his from the first time he ever ran." I said, "And I can't even tell you how many times he wanted me to support somebody that I didn't like." I said, "And I wouldn't do it, starting with John Ray." I said, "But we never fell out, as long as I supported him. So, you can't fall out with people if they don't do what you want them to do because you have a problem." I said, "That's the wrong way to go." I said, "That's going to really narrow your appeal."

BK: Not the Marion way to go.

CB: The other thing I told them, I said what you –

[Begin cora_barry_part2]

CB: They won't really do it behind your back. They'll do it behind your back. So, to me, that was his greatness. That first term was amazing. It was very diverse.

BK: Very diverse, indeed. Well, Cora, thank you.

CB: And she stuck right with him to the very end, even though all the people. When he got that last term, the first – you can cut that off, because this is not the first. This is the last term.

BK: Okay. Let me just close our conversation by saying thank you very much for talking to us. My name is Betty King, and I have been talking to Cora Masters Barry.

[End of Interview]